

Researching the Multi-local Everyday Life of Families

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*International Workshop
„The Everyday Life of Multi-Local Families: Concepts,
Methods and the Example of Post-Separation Families”
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Outline

1. Research design of the study “Multi-local post-separation families”
2. Methodological challenges resulting from conceptual assumptions
3. Reasons for a multi-sited ethnographic study
4. Space sensible research methodologies
5. Conclusions

1. Multi-local Families in Germany: Performing Everyday Family Life in the Case of Spatial Distance

Duration: 1/2009 to 12/2013

Funded by: Volkswagen Foundation

Hosted at: German Youth Institute (DJI), Munich, Germany

Research Design

1. Two qualitative studies

=> *How is family life ‚done‘, when parents and their minor children live periodically or permanently in spatial distance from each other?*

a. **Multi-local life of post-separation families** (2010/11)

b. Multi-locality due to different types of work-related mobility (since 2012)

2. Statistical analyses

=> *How many families live multi-locally in Germany? How is their „geography“ (distances, contacts)?*

- **DJI-Integrated Survey ‘Growing up in Germany: every day life’ (AID:A)** ($n_{\text{total}} > 25.000$; $n_{0-17\text{age}} = 12.412$ target persons) and other relevant data sets, e.g. JobMob, PAIRFAM

1. Study “Multi-local life of post-separation families” (1/4)

Research Questions

How is family life ‘done’ after a parental separation, when parents and their minor children live in separate households, sometimes even long distances from each other?

- How is everyday family life organised here and there?
- How is it experienced?
- What are the specific challenges of a family life distributed across several households?
- Which practices do family members develop to deal with this phenomenon?
- To what extent does a multi-local everyday life open up new possibilities of performing family?

1. Study “Multi-local life of post-separation families” (2/4)

Methodological Design

- Maximum variation sampling: 11 post-separation family systems
- 41 theme-centered narrativ-oriented interviews
 - 28 adults (separated mothers and fathers; their new partners)
 - 13 multi-locally living children (aged 6 to 17)
- Short socio-demographic questionnaire (adults)
- Visual methods (children)
 - (Auto)Photography (Wuggenig 1990),
 - Socio-spatial network game (Picot/Schröder 2007)
- (Video-supported) mobile and local participant observation:
7 families
- Unstructured observation, artefacts

1. Study “Multi-local life of post-separation families” (3/4)

Sample Characteristics (1)

- 12 different locations, Berlin and mainly cities in West Germany

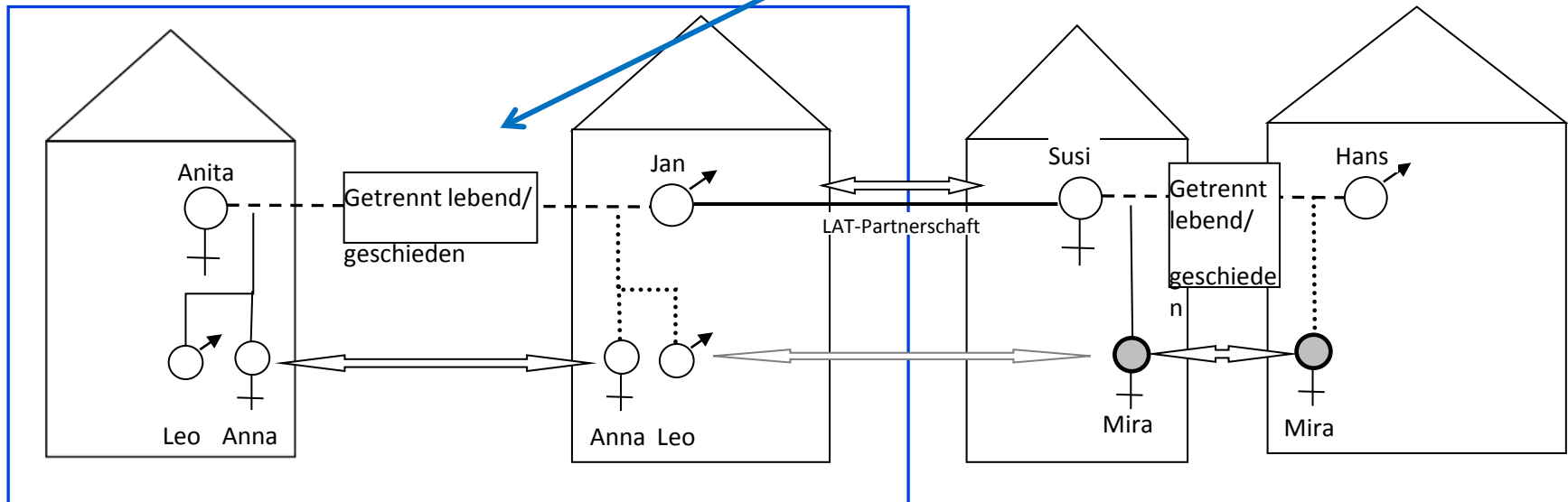
	Child´s place of residence	Distances between households
3	shared residence with equal parenting time	Same village or city
6	primary residence with the mother	2 same city; 22 km; 30 km; 230 km; 374 km
1	primary residence with the father	Same village
1	one child reside with the mother, the other with the father	About 560 km

- High variety of family system constellations (with/without new partners, LAT or living together, with/without half/step children)

1. Study “Multi-local life of post-separation families” (4/4)

Sample Characteristics (2)

- 17 actively multi-local children in the households visited; whole family systems: altogether 29 actively multi-local children (aged 2 to 18),



- in all cases – except one – joint custody
- for more than two years separated
- most parents highly educated
- Fathers in a better financial situation than mothers

2. Conceptional Assumptions – Methodological Challenges

Conceptional Assumptions

1. Family as a fluid social network
2. Family relations as stretched across multiple households
3. Family life as created by all family members through a set of everyday practices
4. Multilocality: need to develop practices for coping with the new spatio-temporal patterns for the day-to-day life; circular mobility as constitutive element

Criteria for the methodological design

- Openness: diverse and complex multi-local and trans-spatial practices
- Space sensitive: spatiality of family relations and activity pattern; processes of place attachment; mobility practices
- appropriate for children and adults

3. Choice of a multi-sited ethnographic research design

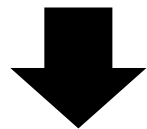
Ethnographic research design

- **Mix of qualitative methods**
 - Observations: lived practices, interactions in natural settings, ‚natural‘ aspects of daily life
 - Narrative-oriented interviews: experienced practices, interpretations
- **Multi-sited approach** (Marcus 1995)
 - Research at multiple locations
 - “Follow the people, the things, the metaphors, the story, the biography, the conflict“

4. Space sensitive research methods appropriate for children (1/3)

Space

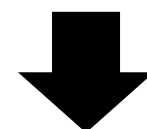
- Spatial distribution of the social relations and activities of actively multi-local children
- Emotional importance of places and experiences of their multi-local everyday life



Qualitative network analysis
(Holstein 2006)

Mobility

- Handling of transitions from one familial world to another
- Development of mobility practices
- Use and experience of the state of travelling between their parents' homes



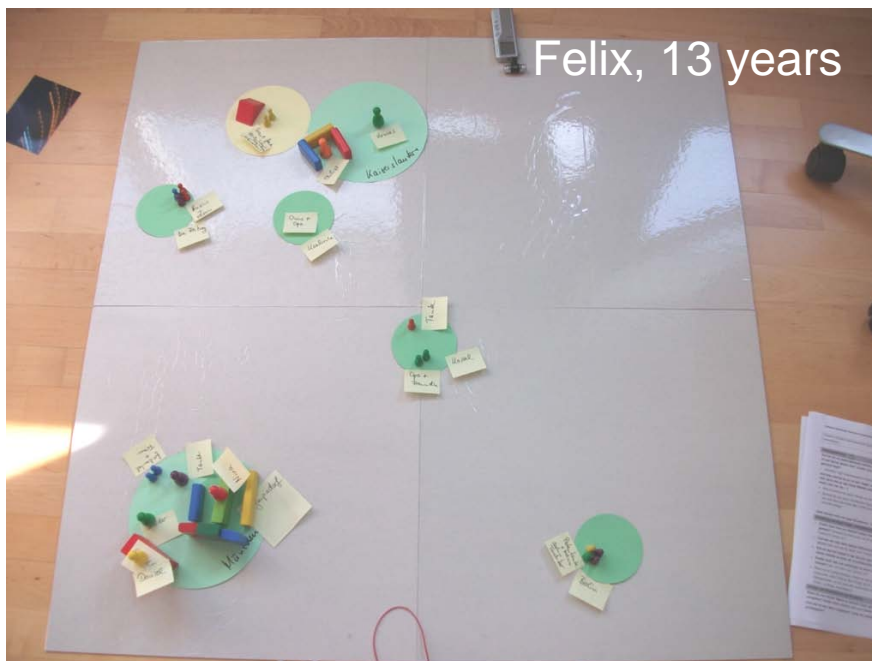
Mobile methodologies
(Fincham et al. 2010, Büscher et al. 2011)

4. Space sensitive research methods appropriate for children (2/3)

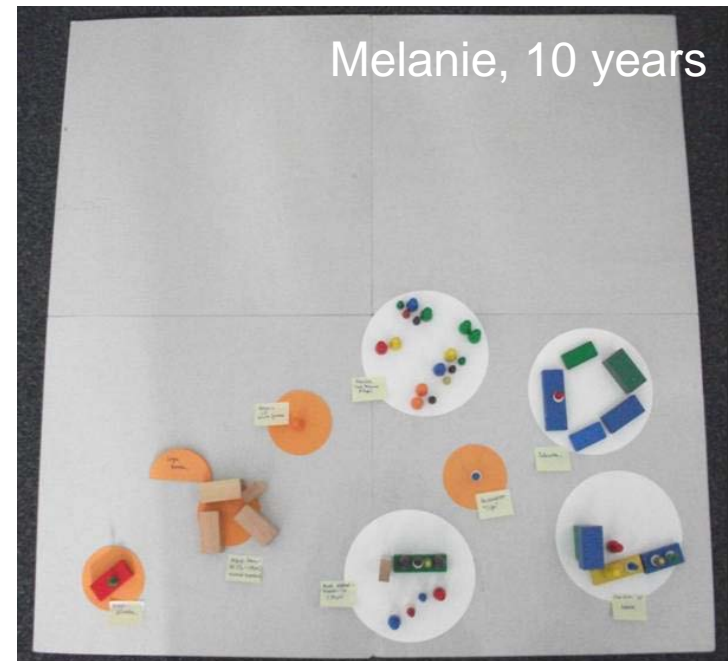
„Socio-spatial network game“ (Picot/Schröder 2007) - a tool for egocentric network analysis

Initial stimulus „*Start off by setting up where you are at home*“

- all children set up two homes, sometimes build up themselves twice
- Some have social networks limited to local area, others maintain spatially extensive social networks



Felix, 13 years



Melanie, 10 years

4. Space sensitive research methods appropriate for children (3/3)

Mobile video ethnography (Mohn 2002, Büscher 2005)

- Verbal and non-verbal communication, body language
- Natural interactions among family members => interaction patterns
- Reconstruction of social rituals (welcomes, goodbyes)
- Insights into spontaneous, situation-related processes of doing family



Felix and Fabio

5 hours by train from their mothers to their fathers home each other weekend

5. Conclusions

Added value of the multi-perspective and mixed-method approach: enrichment of the data

- Combination of methods: wider insights into the everyday life of families
- Data collection from different family members: reconstruction of the multiple realities within the family

Challenges of the multi-perspective and mixed-method approach

- level of analysis: individual, group, dyadic, family level
- development of evaluation procedures applicable to all types of data
- use of divergent and convergent data
- complexity of the data and time consuming-analysis

Thank you for your attention!

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